

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SY-05 MCT-01 OC-06 CCO-00 LAB-04

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /072 W

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P R 171151Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6548

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL MADRAS

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

CINCPAC

COMIPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD, COMIPAC FOR IC AND 1225

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE

SUBJECT: UNIONS CALL OFF STRIKE

REF: A. COLOMBO 0170

1. SUMMARY, ALL STRIKERS RETURNED TO WORK JANUARY 17 ON ORDERS OF THEIR UNIONS BUT RAIL SERVICES WILL NOT COME BACK TO NORMAL FOR SEVERAL DAYS. BUS SERVICES AND GOVERNMENT OFFICES ARE BACK TO NORMAL. SOME STRIKERS HAVE BEEN FIRED BY THE BUS COMPANY. PRESS CENSORSHIP CONTINUES AND HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S AIM OF ENDING THE STRIKE. THE POLITICIANS WILL REFIGHT THE STRIKE ISSUES WHEN THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY MEETS JANUARY. END SUMMARY

2. ALL STRIKING TRADE UNIONS ORDERED THEIR MEMBERS BACK TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WORK AS OF MONDAY, JANUARY 17, ENDING THE STRIKE THAT HAD THREATENED TO CREATE CHAOS IN SRI LANKA. ALTHOUGH ALL THE UNIONS CALLED THEIR ANNOUNCEMENT A MERE "SUSPENSION" OF THE STRIKE, IT WAS CLEARLY A CAPITULATION TO THE GOVERNMENT. A COMBINATION OF PRESS CENSORSHIP, A GOVERNMENT THREAT TO FIRE STRIKERS, EMERGENCY REGULATIONS TO MAINTAIN ESSENTIAL SERVICES, AND A STRONG CHAIRMAN OF THE BUS CORPORATION,

COMBINED TO DEFEAT THE AIMS OF THE STRIKERS.

3. THE JOINT FRONT OF RAILWAY TRADE UNIONS, WHICH HAD STARTED THE STRIKE IN EARNEST DECEMBER 21, ANNOUNCED JANUARY 14 THAT THEIR MEMBERS SHOULD RETURN TO WORK. UNIONS WHICH HAD STRUCK IN SUMPATHY WITH THE RAIL WORKERS, IN OPPOSITION TO THE PM'S ATTEMPT TO BREAK THEIR STRIKE, ALSO ORDERED THEIR MEMBERS BACK TO THE JOB. THESE INCLUDED, NOTABLY, THE JOINT FRONT OF CLERICAL SERVICE UNIONS, THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CLERICAL UNION, AND FOUR UNIONS IN THE CEYLON THRANSPORT BOARD, THE NATION-WIDE BUS CORPORATION. ALL THOSE WORKERS ARE NOW BACK TO WORK.

4. RAIL SERVICE IS STILL NOT BACK TO NORMAL BUT IT HAD BEEN EXPECTED THAT RESUMPTION OF FULL SERVICE WOULD TAKE SOME TIME AFTER THE END OF THE STRIKE. BASIC MAINTENANCE OF EIGINES HAS NOT BEEN DONE FOR ONE MONTH AND SIGNALS AND OTHER SAFETY DEVICES MUST BE RETURNED TO FULL WORKING ORDER. WITH ALL WORKERS NOW ON THE JOB, WE EXPECT FULL SERVICE TO RESUME WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS.

5. IN THE BUS SYSTEM, IT IS CONCEDED THAT JACK KOTELAWALA, CHAIRMAN OF THE CEYLON TRANSPORT BOARD, HAD A KEY ROLE IN KEEPING THE STRIKE FROM BEING THE SUCCESS OPPOSITION TRADE UNIONISTS HADHOPED. WITH SOME ADVANCE NOTICE OF THE STRIKE, KOTELAWALA HAD REHired SUSPENDED DRIVERS AND RETIREES, USED CONDUCTORS AS DRIVERS, AND BORROWED SOME MANPOWER FROM A PRIVATE SECTOR CONCERN. ALTHOUGH BUS SE VICE WAS SHARPLY CUT IN SOME AREAS, NOTABLY THE SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IT REMAINED AT TOLERABLE LEVELS INCOLOMBO ITSELF. KOTELAWALA HAD THREATENED SEVERAL TIMES TO HIRE ON A PERMANENT BASIS MEN TO REPLACE STRIKERS BUT ALWAYS EXTENDED THE DEADLINE SLIGHTLY. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME STRIKE REINGLEADERS WERE FIRED JANUARY 17, AFTER THE FOUR UNIONS HAD CAPITULATED. THE BUS COMPANY HAD BEEN HEAVILY PACKED WITH FOLLOWERS OF THE NOW-OPPOSITION LANKA SAMA JAMAJA PARTY (LSSP) DURING THE TIME (BEFORE SEPTEMBER 1975) WHEN IT WAS A MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING COALITION AND HAD CONTROL OF THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT.

6. PRESS CENSORSHIP ALSO PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN THE GOVERNMENT SUCCESS IN ENDING THE STRIKE. ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION PAPERS PRINTED MOSTLY BLANK PAGES, THE IMPORTANT LAKE HOUSE PRESS CHAIN AS WELL AS THECRMONOPOLY GOVERNMENT RADIO CONTINUED TO REPORT POLLYANNA-TYPE NEWS OF STRIKERS FLOCKING BACK TO WORK, NO DOUBT UPSETTING WORKERS WHO WERE CUT OFF FROM PRESS ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THEIR UNION LEADERS AND FROM OBJECTIVE REPORTS OF HOW THE STRIKE WAS

FARING. CENSORSHIP IS CONTINUING ON BAD NEWS GUEATING TO THE STRIKE.

7. THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION, UNITED FOR A CHANGE, HAS BEEN CARRYING ON AN UNELIGHTENING AND POLEMICAL DIALOGUE BY LETTER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OVER WHETHER OR NOT THE STRIKE IS JUSTIFIED, WHETHER OR NOT SHE SHOULD NEGOTIATE WITH THE UNIONS BEFORE THEY RETURN TO WORK, AND WHETHER OR NOT THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY (NSA) SHOULD BE CONVENED EARLIER THAN SCHEDULED. WITH THE STRIKE NOW OVER, WITH NO GOVERNMENT CONCESSIONS, THE OPPOSITION WILL NOW TURN TO DEBATE IN THE NSA, WHEN THE NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED SESSION IS HELD JANUARY 20, AFTER A MONTH'S VACATION.

8. THE LEAD STORY IN THE LSSP AND COMMUNIST PARTY PARESS JANUARY 17 PRESUMABLY COMMENTED ON POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF THE STRIKE AND WAS COMPLETELY CUT BY THE CENSOR, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ACCOMPANYING PECTURES OF FOUR GOVERNMENT M.P.'S NANDA ELLAWALA, TENNYSON EDIRISURIYTGN A.M. JINADASA, AND P.G. ARIYATILLEKE. SINCE ELLAWALA HAS BEEN PROMINENT IN RECENT DAYS IN SUPPORT OF THE STRIKE AND THE OTHERS ARE MEMBERS OF THE PARTY FACTION WITH WHICH HE IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED, THERE IS SPECULATION THAT THEY HAVE BEEN CENSURED BY THE PARTY. ONE NEWSPAPER REPORTED, UNCENSORED, THAT THEY HAD BEEN HAVING DISCUSSIONS WITH LSSP LEADER N.M. PERERA AND HARD-LINE COMMUNIST DR. S.A. WKCKREMASINGHE.

9. COMMENT: A STEADY TRICKLE OF RETURNING RAIL WORKERS, THE CONSEQUENT RUNNING OF MORE TRAINS EVERY DAY, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S THREAT TO REPLACE STRIKERS WITH NEW EMPLOYEES BROUGHT PRESSURE ON UNION LEADERS WHICH LED TO THE WEEKEND CAPITULATION.  
REED

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